

Gender in the Union

SADTU INDUCTION
2015



Aims of the Discussion

- To promote gender equality and empowerment of women/men
- To look at how to equip women/men with leadership skills in order to enable them to participate effectively in decision making structures of the union
- To highlight some challenges in trade union gender struggles
- To build gender conscious cadres
- To give the role of the gender desk

SETTING THE CONTEXT

WHAT IS GENDER?

- GENDER IS SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED AND SOCIALLY DEFINED EXPECTATIONS OF WOMEN AND MEN
- REFERS TO ATTRIBUTES, ROLES, ACTIVITIES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND NEEDS CONNECTED TO BEING MEN AND WOMEN

CONVEYER BELTS

- FAMILY
- RELIGION
- SCHOOLS
- STATE
- LAWS

- SEX
- Sex refers to the physical differences between men and women
- POWER RELATIONS
- Gender is not only about roles and expectations but also about the relationship between men and women

PATRIARCHY

- Patriarchy refers to the system of male domination over women
- Subordination of women to male authority, in the family and the community
- Limited decision making power
- Limitations on mobility
- Objectification of women as a form of property
- Violence, rape and the threat of violence
- Sexual division of labour in which women are confined to:
 - child rearing and personal services for adult males in the household
 - Specific types of wage work related to the household role (cleaning, domestic work) low in status and pay

Origin of the family, private property & the state



- Early societies were matrilineal and matriarchal
- According to Engels group marriage was the first form of family
- Women's subsistence labour was a form of livelihood and power
- Male domination began with the emergence of private property in agricultural societies (development of farming led to a surplus)
- The existing sexual division of labour became an oppressive one as it became linked to status and trade

HOW WOMEN ARE CONTROLLED IN A PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM

- WOMEN'S LABOUR POWER
- WOMEN'S SEXUALITY
- WOMEN'S MOBILITY
- PROPERTY AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Reproductive Labour



Rural, female-headed households are the poorest in the country.

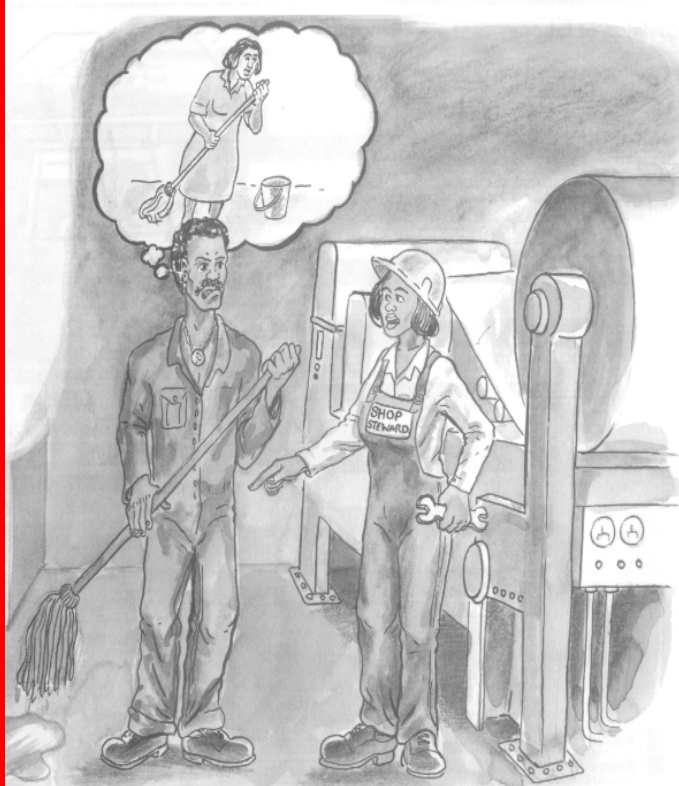
- Every day workers return to the workplace fit to work – rested, fed, clothed and nurtured
- Whose labour is this?
- Hidden household labour (mostly women's labour) means capitalists can pay lower wages and maximise profits
- Unpaid reproductive labour has a strong class and racial dimension



Household power relations

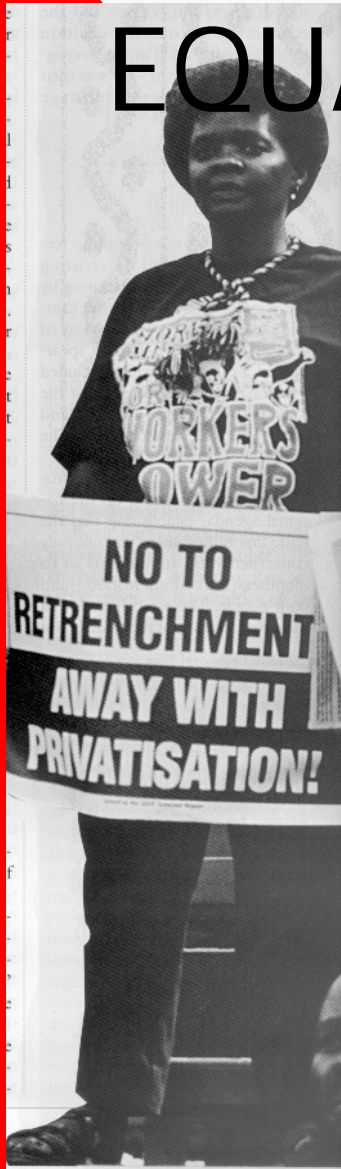
- The family is an instrument of control and oppression of women
- Lenin condemned 'domestic slavery' and 'humiliating subjugation' of women in the household
 - "Notwithstanding all the laws emancipating women, she continues to be a domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery..." (Lenin, 1919)
- Unequal power relations in households
- Children internalise conservative gender roles in the family and learn to conform to capitalism
- The family becomes a shock absorber of the oppressive society– domestic violence, child abuse
- Families become isolated and reduced to units of consumption

GENDER AND TRADE UNIONS



- WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN TRADE UNIONS
- MEN MOSTLY LEAD TRADE UNIONS
- MANY UNIONS USE MECHANISMS LIKE RESERVED SEATS, QUOTAS
- THIS IS THE SAME EVEN IN OUR UNION
- WOMEN HAVE TO ACCEPT THEIR POWER IF THEY ARE TO BECOME LEADERS

COMMITTEES OF GENDER EQUALITY



UNIONS HAVE SET UP COMMITTEES TO STRUGGLE FOR GENDER

GENDER COMMITTEES OFTEN DO NOT HAVE REAL INFLUENCE IN UNIONS

- SOMETIMES THESE ARE JUST SEPARATE STRUCTURES OF WOMEN ONLY
- THEY DON'T HAVE REAL INFLUENCE IN EXECUTIVE STRUCTURES
- IN MOST STRUCTURES THEY ARE NOT AT THE CORE OF THE WORK OF UNIONS
- UNIONISTS DO NOT SPEND ENOUGH TIME DEFINING THE STRUCTURE'S ROLE, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

THE LINK BETWEEN GENDER, EDUCATION AND CAMPAIGNS

- UNIONS OFTEN SEPERATE EDUCATION, CAMPAIGNS AND ORGANISING
- GENDER ISSUES ARE THOUGHT TO FALL UNDER EDUCATION (THROUGH AWARENESS RAISING WORKSHOPS)
- THE UNION'S OVERALL POLITICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL PROGRAMME – NOT ONLY GENDER STRUCTURES SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS MAKING MEMBERS AWARE OF GENDER ISSUE
- GENDER STRUCTURES SHOULD BE SEEN AS PLACES TO STRATEGISE

GENDER AND POWER RELATIONS IN TRADE UNIONS

- ATTITUDES AND APPROACHES TO GENDER
- MANY UNIONS MEMBERS ARE NOT COMMITTED TO TAKING UP GENDER ISSUES
- IN SOME INSTANCES MALE COMRADES CONSCIOUSLY RESIST ATTEMPTS TO HAVE GENDER ISSUES BECOME PART OF THE BROADER CONCERNS OF THE UNION

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE UNION

- PARTNERS OF WOMEN WORKERS DO NOT WANT THEM TO ATTEND UNION MEETINGS
- TIME MEETINGS ARE CALLED
- MEN'S ATTITUDES IN UNIONS
- STEREOTYPES ABOUT GENDER ROLES
- INTERNALISED OPPRESSION
- SEXUAL HARASSMENT

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF GENDER DESK

- ❖ IT'S A SUB COMMITTEE OF AN EXECUTIVE STRUCTURE
- ❖ IT'S A CAMPAIGNING STRUCTURE OF THE UNION
- ❖ TO TAKE CARE OF THE WELFARE OF MEMBERS
- ❖ ANALYSE POLICIES ON GENDER AND ADVISE THE EXECUTIVE STRUCTURE
- ❖ DEVELOP POLICIES ON GENDER ON BEHALF OF THE UNION
- ❖ REPRESENT THE UNION AT ALL STAKEHOLDER FORUMS AND INFLUENCE THEM
- ❖ ASSIST TO OBSERVE AND CELEBRATE CRITICAL DAYS

TRANSFORMING GENDER RELATIONS (WAY FORWARD)

- BUILDING ACTIVISTS GENDER STRUCTURES
- POLITICAL SUPPORT AND RESOURCES
- PROGRESSIVE THEORY
- THE LEADING ROLE OF WOMEN
- THE NEED FOR SEPARATE FORUMS FOR WOMEN
- ELECTION OF WOMEN AS SITE STEWARDS AND LEADERS
- TAKING UP GENDER ISSUES IN COLLECTIVE BARGAINING
- DEVELOPING CREATIVE ORGANISING METHODS FOR WOMEN LEADERS

CLOSURE

IN CLOSING LET ME REMIND YOU OF MADIBA'S WORDS, HE TOLD US IN 1996 THAT: " THE LEAGCY OF OPPRESSION WEIGHS HEAVILY ON WOMEN. AS LONG AS WOMEN ARE BOUND BY POVERTY AND AS LONG AS THEY ARE LOOKED DOWN UPON, HUMAN RIGHTS WILL LACK SUBSTANCE. AS LONG AS OUTMODED WAYS OF THINKING PREVENT WOMEN FROM MAKING MEANINGFUL CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY,PROGRESS WILL BE SLOW. AS LONG AS A NATION REFUSES TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE EQUAL ROLE OF MORE THAN OF HALF OF ITSELF. IT IS DOOMED TO FAIL"

